oh! BROTHER

TO: NOMAS LEADERSHIP COLLECTIVE
FROM: CHUCK NIESSEN-DERRY
DATE: October 14, 1992

Dear NOMAS Leadership Collective,
Changing Men, and concerned others,

As a member of the collective, I feel I must respond to the most recent crises facing NOMAS today. That is the running of a NAMBLA ad in *Changing Men* with whom we are closely associated and more importantly the publishing of Jeff Beane's article, "First Loves" in the same issue. Mr. Beane's article is of more consequence to NOMAS, Jeff being an extremely active and powerful member of the organization.

Due to Mr. Beane's well known association with NOMAS, when he speaks in a NOMAS supported publication, he represents NOMAS integrity, philosophies, politics and behavior. While NOMAS may be able to distance itself from *Changing Men's* editorial board, it cannot distance itself from Jeff Beane. Jeff Beane is, in part, NOMAS.

I received the Sex and Sexuality issue of *Changing Men (CM)* two days before the Chicago conference. I read it for the first time the night before I left for the EMV conference on Thursday. As I browsed through the pages of *CM*, I began Jeff's article from the back rather than the beginning as I flipped the pages from left to right. I started reading where Jeff begins the story of Ricky Brackbill. How he and Ricky spent the summer together hanging out and how Ricky was "large for his age and five years younger than I."

Two "red flags" went up in my head as I read these words. Working with men who beat and sexually abuse their wives and children has helped me identify key phrases and concepts that often suggest the possibility of a cover up, denial, and abuse.

When someone refers to the person they have had sex with as being "large for their age," I know they're talking about a child. I also know they understand they are talking about a child as well. Commenting on a sexual "partner's" size and age simultaneously would otherwise be erroneous. For example, you rarely hear someone say, "I had sex with this great guy. He was 32 but big for his age." People who have sex with children always want you to know the kids were "large for their age." Why is that? They would like us to believe that somehow a 12 year old who looks like 15, really is 15. As though somehow their physical size reflects the child's internal world.

Children's ability to reason, their development of self concept, their social development, is not bound to their physical development. Information concerning the developmental processes of children, and adolescents in particular, is extremely clear. The mental, emotional and physical development of a 12 year old is radically different than that of a 17 year old. Among other things, the child at 12 is extremely self conscious and is beginning to develop a sense of self largely dependent on, and vulnerable to, the perceptions of those around them. By age 17 the child has developed

the ability to more clearly rely on his/her own abilities to size themselves up and to identify their good and bad qualities while integrating them into a coherent and stable sense of themselves. The cognitive skills necessary to formulate this type of internal stability is not even available to the early adolescent. The mental and emotional development of a child progresses at age appropriate intervals regardless of how large the child's breasts are or the amount of pubic hair he may have at his groin.

To say a child is large for their age is an attempt to justify being sexual with that child (in the event anyone would question such a judgment). Its a variation of "she was 13 going on 23" that is used by adult perpetrators of incest and other child sexual assault. Its also a variation of a host of phrases used by clinicians and other professionals to explain (away) children's victimization in an attempt to protect, the often, male abuser.

The second flag went up when I read he "was five years younger than I." I suspected then that I was about to read about the sexual exploitation of a child. The next sentence in article secured that suspicion. "I was leaving for college in a few weeks and didn't know if I would see him again before I left."

Mr. Beane does not say in the article how old he or Ricky Brackbill were. I assumed due to the "large for his age" comment that Ricky was underage. I assumed that Mr. Beane, because he was off to college, was 17, 18, or 19 years old. Leaving Ricky Brackbill to be 12,13, or 14. No matter how you cut it, it was a problem.

I talked to Jeff Beane that Thursday afternoon at the NOMAS conference in Chicago to see what age he, and now Mr. Brackbill, were at the time of their "encounter." He told me that he was 17 and Ricky was 12. I shared with him my concern that the power imbalance inherent in such an age difference was highly problematic as the 12 year old did not have the ability to consent under those circumstances. Due to the 12 year old's *inability* to make an **informed** decision he could not consent to sex. He is rather powerless over a more developed intellects powers of persuasion and/or manipulation, not to mention the tendency of a 12 year old to idolize older teens. (I turned 12 in sixth grade. I remember distinctly how the senior high school basketball players were like gods to me. It was also clear that they lived in an entirely different world than mine.)

Jeff told me he felt much of the research on sex with children was perhaps homophobic and explained how he had worked with clients that had had similar experiences who identified it as a positive event in their lives. I told Mr. Beane that I had worked with countless men who had been sexually abused as children, in very much the same fashion as he describes in "First Loves", who were severely traumatized by the experience and struggle daily with it as adults. I went on to say that whether or not the children who are subject to this activity by adults and older children, identify the experience as positive or negative, the point is that *they* didn't get to choose. The implicit imbalance of power that is present between an adult and child does not allow a mutuality that is necessary in consensual sex. He said he had a different view about that. I asked him directly then if he thought today it would be appropriate for a 17 year old to be sexual with a 12 year old. He thought "it would not necessarily be inappropriate."

As I looked at those two sentences in the article again (he was large for his age, five years younger, and I'm off to college,) another flag went up in my head.

The scenario is not altogether unfamiliar to me. I can relate easily, as a male at 17, to being around someone who I liked and who liked me, who was a "bit vulnerable" or malleable, and . . . it being the last time I was going to see them before I'm off . . . (to college of where ever) "maybe I can get a little piece of ass here before I go! I won't be

around later to have to deal with their emotional response and in time they'll probably leave me alone." etc. etc. etc..

Now before I totally wrote this off as just another variation of the age old male trip of "fuck em" and "forget em" (no matter how romantic we insist it all was), I wanted to look for other information in the article that would support again that what I was reading was not about "love" but about exploitation.

I looked for how sex was initiated. Was one player more dominant than the other or was the initiation more mutual. As you read on in the article, Jeff initiates all the sexual contact. He explores Ricky's arm and thick red hair. He blows the candle out. He says if we sleep in one bag we'll be warmer. He looked into "his pink-lipped boyish face." He touched him, licked his lips. When Ricky didn't pull away, he kissed him fully. He lay on top of him etc. etc.. At the point Jeff says he lay on top of Ricky, he also says he "was afraid of crushing him, even though he was almost my size." Again Mr. Beane lets us know that Ricky was big for his age. He wouldn't want his readers to conjure up images of this fully grown, young adult, off to college male, crushing this poor 12 year old, off to 8th grade kid under him, now would he. From their, Jeff goes on in detail how their penises lay side by side. How he reached for Ricky's cock and then Ricky reached for his. How they stroked and fondled each other until orgasm by first Jeff, than Ricky. All this written out in luscious romantic detail. It would actually be a quite wonderfully erotic piece if it weren't for that one "small" detail . . . Ricky was 12 years old and not going to be seeing his buddy Jeff for quite a few months after that.

After reading the ending of "First Loves" I was really quite upset. I continued to read backward through the article looking again for clues that Mr. Beane was describing "transgressional" sex for sure. The next experience I read about was with Harry. The first boy Jeff ever kissed.

This is another romantic little tale of how Jeff and Harry, 14 and 13, were in the Leacock Presbyterian Church choir together. Jeff longingly tells us how he would "if successful" trap Harry over the hump of the back seat of the car as they traveled to nearby churches to sing. He did this so that when he pressed his "entire leg against" Harry's, Harry would have no place to move. Occasionally, as Jeff complained about the crowded conditions in the back seat, he'd stretch out his "arm closest to Harry and rest it gently across his shoulder." His leg pressing against Harry's, his arm on his shoulder, "flushed all over, penis erect."

At this point in the story we're "not sure" how Harry feels about all this. Sure Jeff can touch him at Jeff's leisure, but heh, maybe Harry "likes it." Maybe Harry "secretly desires" Jeff. Maybe Harry's "just playing hard to get." Who Knows?! (Shouldn't Jeff have known, or cared?)

What happens in the "sanctuary of the church" provides more information about the degree to which Harry consented to be touched.

Jeff explains that during a break at choir practice he tells Harry he wants to talk to him. According to the article, Jeff knew what he wanted. He had been planning it for weeks. In the "musty, dimly lit vestibule, Harry leaned back against the wall." Jeff placed both his hands on the wall on either side of Harry's head, "inches from his ears." (Doesn't leave Harry much room to move his head now does it.) Jeff continues by saying "Harry there's something I want to tell you" and "pulled by some inner force" (Now are we supposed to think that some mysterious force caused Jeff Beane to do what he did next or are we to believe what he told us earlier in the article, that is "I knew what I wanted. I had been planning it for weeks.") Jeff pressed his lips against Harry's. Then Harry physically knocked Jeff's arms away and ran from the vestibule. Apparently Harry wasn't particularly 'hot' for Jeff. Apparently, no doubt, Harry felt violated. As it appears he

was.

Jeff Beane, however, remembers it romantically.

In the homophobic climate of America today and in the late 50's or early 60's, when this presumably took place, it may be understandable, having limited sexual outlet or validation, that a gay, 14 year old boy, may entrap another and violate his boundaries this way. For an adult male therapist, a prominent member of a pro-feminist organization who's fundamental commitment is to challenge and end men's abusive use of sex and power, to glorify that violation, in a pro-feminist magazine no less, is unconscionable!

As far as the incident with Ricky Brackbill, I cannot be convinced that a 17 year old, young adult male, ready to go off to college, did not know, on some level, the power he had over a no doubt adoring 12 year old boy. Regardless of the lack of cultural sensitivity to the issue, I knew in the early seventies, when I was a senior in high school, that if I had sex with a 7th grader, it was wrong. Period! I knew it because I knew what "jail bait" meant. I knew what "robbing the cradle" referred to. These were terms alive and well then, as I'm sure they were in the early sixties. Minimally I understood them to at least "insinuate" that being sexual with someone 5 years your junior was a problem.

More significantly, however, aside from this type of bantering, I knew it was wrong because I could, at 17, clearly identify the power differences between myself and a 12 year old. I didn't think of them as "power differences" at the time, but I knew, if I wanted to, that I could manipulate some 7th grader into having sex with me. And I knew that would be wrong.

That was then. This is now! Thirty years or so later, Jeff Beane, founding father of NOMAS, is still romanticizing the sexual abuse of a minor!

In Minnesota, the activity Mr. Beane describes in "First Loves" with Ricky Brackbill is a felony! Minnesota statute 609.343 reads in part: Criminal Sexual Conduct in the Second Degree Subdivision 1. A person is guilty of criminal sexual conduct in the second degree if he engages in sexual contact with another person and if any of the following circumstances exists:

*(a) the complainant is under 13 years of age and the actor is more than 36 months (3 years) older than the complainant. Neither mistake as to the complainant's age nor consent to the act by the complainant is defense. In a prosecution under this clause, the state is not required to prove that the sexual contact was coer*ced:

Obviously I have gone to great lengths to articulate how and why activity outlined in "First Loves" is abusive. It is unfortunate that I have had to do so.

The question now is, does NOMAS agree it was abusive? And if it does, how will we address one of our most prominent and influential leaders romanticizing that abuse. Also, if pornography is defined by an implicit imbalance of power in sexually explicit material, than what Jeff Beane wrote and what *Changing Men* published, was pornography. Child pornography!

How many progressive 17, 18, or 19 year old males reading *Changing Men* this summer were encouraged by Jeff Beane's article to have sex with 12 year olds. With our blessing! All the blessings of "the premiere" pro-feminist organization of America. If we don't act on this article, we do just that! If NOMAS wants to encourage 17 year olds to have sex with 12 year olds, than do nothing. If, however, that is something you, as the leadership collective, do not want to endorse, than we had better address both our affiliation to *Changing Men* and Jeff Beane.

It was only later that I found out about the NAMBLA ad in the same issue. Publishing Beane's article and the NAMBLA ad in the same issue of *Changing Men* was

no mistake. I cannot believe the editors were unconscious of the connecting themes. One way or another, *Changing Men* is, in fact, revealing itself.

If the editors did not recognize the pedophilia supported by these two pieces (no small feat considering NAMBLA's ad), than their complacency toward the sexual abuse of children is such that it makes them unqualified to edit a pro-feminist magazine. If they were aware of how these pieces supported the abuse of children (even while they deny such), they are unqualified for the job. In either case, those responsible should resign.

We will see how we, NOMAS, reveal ourselves as we address these issues so fundamental to our cause.

NOMAS should disassociate itself from *Changing Men* immediately unless and until *Changing Men* is accountable to women, children and NOMAS membership by explaining *in detail* the inappropriateness of Jeff Beane's article and the NAMBLA ad. (There are other problems with this issue that I won't address here.) *Changing Men* should donate a significant contribution to organizations working to stop child sexual abuse as surely this issue will be used by a perpetrator to justify his initial or continual abuse of children. By printing "First Loves" and the NAMBLA ad, *Changing Men* has not only supported pedophile's criminal activity but has assisted them in networking with one another so they can swap stories and photographs of real and potential victims. We have actually assisted them in their efforts to rape and "peddle" children, rather than our professed goal of stopping them!

NOMAS should develop a committee to discuss with Jeff Beane the implications of his article. Mr. Beane should publicly apologize and articulate his bad judgment as a 17 year old. More specifically however, he should state clearly and in detail how "First Loves" supports the sexual abuse of children. *Changing Men* should provide the format for him to do so. Further Jeff should also be expected to donate to those working with victims of childhood sexual abuse. If Mr. Beane refuses to be accountable in this way, he should be asked to leave NOMAS.

Jeff Beane and *Changing Men* have a responsibility to NOMAS membership. I personally have spoken throughout Minnesota on the topic of men's violence to women and children. When I speak, I often identify myself as a NOMAS member. The publication of "First Loves" and the NAMBLA ad in *Changing Men* jeopardizes my credibility, as it does every other member of NOMAS.

I can no longer publicly support *Changing Men* or NOMAS until we have cleaned this mess up. It is my sincere hope that this does not get swept under the rug like the racial issues surrounding Tuscon were. How this is dealt with organizationally will certainly influence whether I continue to support NOMAS with my work and membership. I could not, in good conscience, be affiliated with any organization that supported the sexual abuse of children, either directly, as is evidenced in *Changing Men*, or indirectly by its complacency. My allegiances are, after all, to women and children.

Lastly, it seems that as these serious issues come before NOMAS, one after the other, that we have no formal body of feminist women to whom we are structurally accountable to. I propose that NOMAS develop a committee of feminist women to whom we are accountable. This committee would, at its discretion, provide NOMAS with leadership and input regarding the various issues that come before us. We would also seek their guidance, suggestions, and general feed back as to how we could best use our energies to help confront male privilege and power. We would pay these consultants an agreeable price for these services.

The question of course is, are we NOMAS men ready and willing to listen to, and take direction from, feminist women?

Are we really serious about ending men's violent oppression of women and children *especially* if it means cleaning our own house?!

I am sincerely yours, Chuck Niessen-Derry